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SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICAN VISA APPLICATIONS FROM ZIMBABWE -
STAGGERING

¶1. (SBU) According to First Secretary Consul Mshiyeni Dennis Nzuza, the South African Embassy in Harare processes approximately 360,000 Zimbabwean visa applications yearly. In a meeting with post's consul, Nzuza explained the South African Consular Section consisted of 5 adjudicating officers and 26 local employees, and accepted approximately 1000 applications from Zimbabweans queuing at the embassy each day. In addition, the section receives an additional 1000 applications daily from various courier services. Nzuza said their approval rate was over 90 percent, about 324,000/year, in a 7-10 day turn-around process that included a namecheck for prior overstays. He characterized the vast majority of Zimbabwean applicants as economic migrants, and acknowledged the large number of applications reflected a SAG relaxation of visa requirements over the past two years. Describing the South African visa adjudication process as a paper process without any biometric data collection (photo or fingerprints), he said fraudulent documents were a huge issue and estimated that 30 percent of the Zimbabwean passports he sees contain false biographical information.

¶2. (SBU) Zimbabwe is South Africa's only neighboring country which does not have a free visa policy. Due to Zimbabwe's self-destructive political and economic policies, unemployment is well over 90 percent which continues to fuel a tidal wave of emigration, both legal and clandestine. Although the International Organization for Migration claims an average of 3,900 illegal Zimbabweans are deported each week, Nzuza estimated that the Zimbabwean population in South Africa continues to grow by 300,000/year. While the sheer number of Zimbabweans has stressed the South African infrastructure, created "quasi-refugee" camps deplored by numerous human rights groups, and created internal South African social upheaval, the SAG has been steady in its reluctance to grant refugee status to the Zimbabweans, nor facilitate some sort of legal status. At the heart of the SAG's dilemma is that by acknowledging refugee or humanitarian migrant status to the Zimbabweans, the SAG would also be acknowledging the failed policies of the government it supports in Zimbabwe.

¶3. (SBU) Putting the situation in practical terms, Nzuza lamented his workload, comparing the South Africa-Zimbabwe border to the U.S.-Mexico border. Although South Africa relaxed its Zimbabwean visa requirements following a meeting of the two Ministers of Home Affairs in Harare in May 2007, he said the decision was "political" and that South Africa was far from removing the Zimbabwe visa requirement as envisioned by the SADC Protocol for the Facilitated Movement of Persons. Acknowledging that South Africans have no visa requirement to enter Zimbabwe and that the GOZ has been calling for the same from the SAG, Nzuza said his

government's policy on the subject has been steady: "Get your house in order first, then we'll discuss removal of visas." When asked to specify, he said Zimbabwe would have to stabilize its political, economic, and border security issues before the removal of the visa requirement was realistic.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: As SADC leader, South Africa's vision of a Free Travel/Movement Zone within the SADC region is in direct conflict with its experience with the Zimbabwean Border. It cannot afford to lift Zimbabwean travel restrictions without running the risk of opening the country to an even larger wave of migrants and domestic protest. While the SAG has heretofore been reluctant to criticize the policies of the Mugabe government, the scale of Zimbabwean emigration will certainly strain this policy for its new President.
DHANANI